

Message Text

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DRAFTED BY EA/RA:HEHOROWITZ:MJ:JG
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E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MARR, PARM

SUBJECT: CONVENTIONAL ARMS TRANSFERS TALKS

1. DEPARTMENT BRIEFED NEW ZEALAND EMBASSY OFFICER (FIRST SECRETARY LARKINDALE) AUGUST 16 ON RECENTLY COMPLETED THIRD ROUND OF CONVENTIONAL ARMS TRANSFERS (CAT) TALKS WITH THE SOVIETS IN HELSINKI. MAIN POINTS WERE AS FOLLOWS:

A. FIRST TWO ROUNDS IN DECEMBER AND IN MAY WERE VERY PRELIMINARY BUT AT END OF SECOND ROUND A COMMUNIQUE WAS ISSUED IN WHICH THE SOVIETS AGREED THAT CONVENTIONAL ARMS TRANSFERS PROBLEM IS SERIOUS AND NEEDS TO BE DEALT WITH URGENTLY. AT THE RECENT SSOD MEETINGS AT UN, IT WAS WIDELY AGREED THAT CAT IS AN ISSUE THAT SHOULD BE DEALT WITH BILATERALLY, MULTILATERALLY, AND IN REGIONAL CONTEXT. RECENTLY, IN LATIN AMERICA, THE VENEZUELAN AND
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MEXICANS HAVE TAKEN THE INITIATIVE TO REVITALIZE PROPOSALS FOR CONTROL OF CONVENTIONAL ARMS TRANSFERS IN THAT REGION. THESE WERE DEVELOPMENTS WHICH PRECEDED THE RECENT THIRD ROUND WITH THE SOVIETS AT HELSINKI.

B. AT THE THIRD ROUND THE SOVIETS AGAIN PRESSED THEIR PROPOSAL TO LIMIT DISCUSSION TO POLITICAL/LEGAL PRINCIPLES

(I.E., TO DEFINE BROAD CRITERIA FOR LIMITING ARMS TRANSFERS), BUT THEY AGREED TO THE US PROPOSAL FOR THREE PART TALKS THAT WOULD ALSO INCLUDE DISCUSSION OF MILITARY/TECHNICAL CRITERIA (E.G. TO BEGIN TO LIMIT THE TYPE AND AMOUNT OF WEAPONS TRANSFERRED) AND REGIONAL APPLICATIONS (SO THAT DISCUSSIONS OF RESTRAINT MIGHT BECOME MORE SPECIFIC). THE SOVIETS ALSO AGREED IN PRINCIPLE TO THE DESIRABILITY OF INTERIM REGIONAL RESTRAINTS THAT COULD APPLY IN ADVANCE OF ANY AGREEMENT ON THE TYPES OF WORLD WIDE CRITERIA CITED ABOVE.

C. THE SOVIETS STRESSED THE NEED OVER THE LONG TERM TO INVOLVE OTHER SUPPLIERS AND RECIPIENT COUNTRIES. THE U.S. AGREED. BOTH SIDES ALSO AGREED THAT THE TALKS MUST RECOGNIZE THAT ALL COUNTRIES HAVE LEGITIMATE DEFENSE NEEDS, AND THAT THE OBJECTIVE OF THE DISCUSSIONS IS NOT TO STOP ARMS TRANSFERS BUT RATHER TO STABILIZE THE SITUATION AND REVERSE THE UPWARD SPIRAL OF TRANSFERS. OVERALL, SOME COMMON UNDERSTANDING WAS REACHED WITH THE SOVIETS ON WHAT IS NEEDED IF THESE DISCUSSIONS ARE TO LEAD TO SOME SUCCESS.

D. IN THE TALKS WITH THE SOVIETS IT HAS BEEN LEFT OPEN AS TO WHAT KIND OF UNDERSTANDING MIGHT EVENTUALLY RESULT. ONE POSSIBILITY IS PARALLEL NATIONAL GUIDELINES TO
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WHICH SUPPLIER COUNTRIES MIGHT UNILATERALLY ADHERE. RECIPIENTS MIGHT ALSO JOIN.

E. CAT LIMITATIONS ARE EXTREMELY COMPLEX AND DISCUSSIONS CANNOT BE DIVORCED FROM POLITICAL/MILITARY REALITIES. AS THE TWO MAJOR SUPPLIERS, IT IS IMPORTANT THAT WE AND THE SOVIETS TALK FIRST. WE DO NOT YET KNOW HOW FAR THE SOVIETS WILL GO IN THESE DISCUSSIONS, BUT THEIR NEGOTIATORS APPEAR SERIOUS, AND THE TALKS SO FAR HAVE BEEN DEVOID OF POLEMICS.

F. THE ABILITY OF THE US TO SUSTAIN ITS UNILATERAL EFFORTS AT RESTRAINING ARMS TRANSFERS DEPENDS, IN THE LONG RUN, ON THE COOPERATION OF OTHERS. THE NEXT ROUND WITH THE SOVIETS, TENTATIVELY SET FOR DECEMBER, IS ESPECIALLY IMPORTANT, SINCE THE YEARLY US REVIEW OF ITS OWN RESTRAINT POLICY WILL TAKE PLACE NEXT SPRING.

2. THE NEW ZEALAND EMBASSY OFFICER EXPRESSED HIS APPRECIATION FOR THE BRIEFING. HE NOTED A RESIDUAL CONCERN IN NEW ZEALAND ABOUT POSSIBLE IMPLICATIONS OF CAT TALKS FOR SOUTHEAST ASIA, AND SAID OUR STATEMENT THAT THE

LEGITIMATE DEFENSE NEEDS OF VARIOUS COUNTRIES WOULD BE

MET WAS REASSURING. HE ASKED THAT WE CONTINUE TO KEEP
THE GNZ FULLY INFORMED OF FURTHER DEVELOPMENTS IN THESE
DISCUSSIONS. CHRISTOPHER

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